

THURSDAY, AUGUST 27, 1885

THE LIFE OF FRANK BUCKLAND

Life of Frank Buckland. By his Brother-in-Law, George Bompas. (London : Smith, Elder, and Co., 1885.)

FEW Englishmen were unacquainted with the central figure of this admirably written memoir. His ubiquity as a lecturer and inspector, the happy self-forgetfulness and adaptability of manner which associated him with royal princes as readily as with seaside fishermen, and the strong personality by which he permanently impressed all who came in contact with him, made him beyond all other men of his time the representative and the preacher of the subject to which he devoted all the energies of his life. That subject was natural history, a term not without meaning even in the present day of minute and subdivided scientific work, but conterminous with science half a century ago, when comparative anatomy was hardly known, when the microscope was costly and imperfect, when the provinces of nature had not been mapped nor its workers differentiated.

Frank Buckland was born a naturalist, into a home crammed with animals, living, preserved, fossil; his mother a woman of rare intellectual accomplishment and scientific taste, his father the first geologist of the age. At three years old he could "go through all the natural history books in the Radcliffe Library"; at four we find him lispingly explaining to a Devonshire parson who had brought with pride to Dr. Buckland "some very curious fossils," that they were the vertebrae of an *Ichthyosaurus*; at five he is rapturous over the teleology of the "tongue-bone" in the skeleton of a whale; and in the archaeology of Worcester Cathedral can find only one object of interest—the figure of a lady who had been starved by a disease in the throat.

At twelve he went to Winchester, not the least barbarous school of that barbarous scholastic time. He was "launched," and "tin-gloved," and "toe-fit-tied," and "tunded," and "clowed," and "watched out" at cricket, and "kicked in" at foot-ball, living for two or three years the wretched life of a college junior amid a mob of boys not overlooked by any master and influenced by the bad traditions of a savage past. He used to say that it had done him good, had cured him of "bumptiousness" and arrogance, but he cherished painful memories of individual tyrants and of special acts of tyranny, and was wont when a senior boy to criticise with a bitterness alien from the ordinary conservatism of schoolboys the coarseness of a system which turned a gentleman's son, bred in the refinement of a cultured home, into an abject domestic serf.

Buckland's fagging days over, he was happy, for he could follow his bent undisturbed, and the pages which describe his later Winchester life are amongst the most amusing in the biography. Fond of school work he was not; he was, in fact, looked upon as a "thick," and his compulsory fagging experiences had given him a dislike for games. But he wired trout and eels in the clear Itchen streams, dug out mice on "Hills," chased badgers on Twyford Down, skinned and dissected cats, moles, and

bats, articulated skeletons, baked squirrel pies, and cooked mice in batter. A buzzard, an owl, and a racoon tenanted his lockers in "Moab," a viper lived in his "scob" amongst his books, his hedgehogs kept open a perpetual fosse at the base of the college wall, and a regiment of tame jackdaws looked up to him as their patron. On "Saints' days" he attended the Winchester Hospital, bringing back gruesome fragments of humanity in his pocket-handkerchief, talked medical language, treated confiding boys professionally. Applying for admission to the sick house on behalf of a patient who had partaken too generously of "husked gooseberry fool," he informed the surprised second master that the invalid had a "stricture of the colon;" he was wont to offer sixpence to any junior who would allow himself to be bled; and he treated surgically a football-wounded shin with such results that the leg when shown eventually to a doctor was pronounced to be in imminent danger of amputation.

The Winchester life found fuller development at Oxford. No one who knew Frank Buckland there will forget those merry breakfasts in the corner of Fell's Buildings; Frank in the blue pea-jacket and the German student's cap, blowing blasts out of a tremendous wooden cow-horn; the various pets who made it difficult to speak or move: the marmots, and the dove, and the monkey, and the chamaeleon, and the snakes, and the guinea-pigs, and the after-breakfast visits to the eagle or the jackal or the bear or the pariah dog in the little yard outside. His Long Vacations were spent in Germany, whence he brought back little besides collections of red slugs and green frogs; in 1848 he entered at St. George's Hospital, and in 1854 was gazetted Assistant-Surgeon to the second Life Guards.

The next eight years were very pleasant ones. His father's position as Dean of Westminster threw open to him all the best society in London: we read of parties at Miss Burdett-Coutts's, at the Duke of Wellington's, at Chief Baron Pollock's; microscopic evenings at Dr. Carpenter's; walks around the Abbey with Prince Albert; conversations with Sir B. Brodie, Mr. Gladstone, Whewell, Whately, Prof. Owen, Sedgwick, Bunsen, Ruskin. He was beginning to feel his strength and strike out his line in life: in these years he wrote his first magazine article, delivered his first lecture, published his first book. In 1865 he resigned his commission, married, took a house in Albany Street which he has made historic, started *Land and Water*, devoted himself to fish culture, became Inspector of Fisheries, and worked in his vocation till 1880, when he died at the age of fifty-four, worn out by excessive overwork and by the exposure to wet and cold in all seasons which his professional duties, as he interpreted them, involved.

His power as a lecturer was unrivalled. He could keep an audience in ecstasies of laughing enjoyment for two hours at a stretch. He had inherited his father's remarkable felicity of illustration; his own keen delight in his subject was contagious, his comedy incessant and irresistible. Never was a memory more stored with interesting facts. He was all eyes; noted everything, remembered everything, used everything. Through London streets, as he surveyed them from his favourite seat on the knife-board of an omnibus, on the walls of exhibitions, on sea-

coast, river-shore, and hill-side, in the belfry at Ross, by Dean Gainsford's grave—phenomena which others overlooked or passed as trivial were by him pounced upon and analysed and made to bear fruit in discovery and correlation and historical association and practical scientific use. Of human prodigies in every department he was the recognised Proxenus and patron. Miss Swann the giantess and her husband Captain Bates the giant, and the Two-headed Nightingale, and the Siamese Twins, and the New Zealand Chiefs, and Fatima, and Zariffa, and Julia Pastrana the hairy woman, and Benedetti the sword swallower, and the Wild Man of the Woods, and the man who could sing two notes at once, and the man who could drink a bottle of milk under water,—all looked up to him as a father, or sat as guests at his table. He came by degrees to be accepted as an *Arbiter monstrorum*; as the necessary referee whenever any strange revelation or any novel puzzle presented itself in the world of nature. If a whale ran on shore at Gravesend, or a dolphin at Herne Bay; if an unusual sturgeon or tunny was consigned to a London fishmonger; if the lawyers at Nisi Prius were at issue whether a hole in a ship's bottom could have been made by the beak of a swordfish, or the Gloucester Magistrates hesitated over the identity of elvers with young eels; if a sick porpoise arrived at the Zoological Gardens in a condition requiring brandy and water to be exhibited internally and caustic applied without; if the Chief Rabbi felt searchings of heart as to whether oysters might for edible purposes be inserted in the Mosaic catalogue of things that creep; if a sea-lioness were ill in the Aquarium, or a plague of frogs occurred at Windsor; if search were required for John Hunter's coffin in St. Martin's Church, or the skeleton of William Rufus had to be exhumed in Winchester Cathedral,—it was inevitable that Frank Buckland should be telegraphed for first of all. And the influence he exerted was often highly beneficial. To his interference we owe the close time for seals and the Bill for the preservation of marine birds. A description in *Land and Water* of a neglected Museum at Canterbury shamed the Curator into setting it to rights; his good-humoured criticism, from a naturalist's point of view, of the pictures in the Royal Academy, taught the artists beneficially that an eye as keen as Ruskin's was noting their performances in a region beyond Ruskin's reach.

His home in Albany Street was one of the sights of London; but to enter it presupposed iron nerves and a stomach like those of Horace's reapers. Iron nerves—for, introduced at once to some five-and-twenty poor relations, exempt from shyness and deeply interested in your dress and person, to Jacko, and the Hag, and the Nigger, and Jenny, and Tiny, and the parrot and the jaguar, and the laughing jackass, and Jemmy the suricate, and Dick the bear, and Arslan the Turkish wolf-dog, you felt, like Jaques in the play, as if another flood were toward, and the animals were parading for admission. Dura ilia—for the genius of experiment, supreme in all departments of the house, was nowhere so active as at the dinner-table. We read of panther chops, rhinoceros pie, bison steaks, kangaroo ham, horse's tongue, elephant's trunk; of whale boiled with charcoal to refine the flavour; of tripang and lump-fish; of stewed whelks and land-snails, roasted hedgehog, potted ostrich. We notice in

the diary such entries as "seedy from lump-fish;" "very poorly indeed, effects of horse;" and we sympathise with a departing guest who notes—"tripe for dinner—don't like crocodile for breakfast."

He was the Samson of science; the "Sunny One" amongst *savants*, as was Manoah's son amongst judges; roars of genial laughter accompany the heroism and the feats of both. But the comic recollections which surround him ought not to mask the serious admiration which is his due;—first, as a public teacher, circulating popular science, generating field clubs and microscopical societies, preparing a public to appreciate and to support the more purely scientific labourer; secondly, as a material benefactor, raising in fifteen years the commercial value of English and Scottish salmon to the extent of 100,000*l.* per annum; thirdly, as having in a manner rare, if not unique, passed behind the veil which hangs between us and the animal creation. He understood their gestures and expressions as we interpret those of one another, and they understood him in their turn; the creatures at the Gardens, the beasts at Jamrach's, the pets at home, seemed to know him in a human fashion; his dying words—"God is so good to the little fishes that I do not think He will let their inspector suffer shipwreck at the last"—show his identity of feeling with them; no one could talk to him long without a strangely new and reverential sense of brotherhood with these existences who were to him so entirely fraternal as people of his Father's pasture and sheep of his Father's hand. Science has had very many greater sons; none more simple, modest, blameless; none more genial, more humane, or more beloved.

W. TUCKWELL

COMPENSATION OF COMPASSES

Practical Guide for Compensation of Compasses without Bearings. By Lieut. Collet, French Navy, Tutor in the Polytechnique School of France. Translated by W. Bottomley. With a Preface by Sir W. Thomson, F.R.S., &c. (Portsmouth: Griffin and Co., 1885.)

THIS work appears in its English garb under the auspices of Sir W. Thomson.

In the published instructions for the adjustment of his patent compass, Sir William Thomson gives short directions for the use of the deflector, an instrument to facilitate correcting that compass by magnets and soft iron when neither bearings of sun nor terrestrial objects can be obtained. With this deflector a fog is not the unwelcome visitor it generally is, for with the fog there is often a smooth sea, a condition favourable to a successful use of this delicate instrument.

As an invention of Sir W. Thomson it is certain that the inquirer into the use of the deflector will at once be disposed to look for an instrument theoretically correct in conception and of great refinement in construction. The useful work of fully describing the practical applications and several uses of this instrument has, however, been left to an able writer on subjects connected with the compass in iron ships—Lieut. Collett, of the French Navy—and the book now under review is the result.

It may be remarked that Sir W. Thomson, in the preface, fully recognises it as a complete and able exponent